

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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R 160455Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8128

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

S E C R E T VIENTIANE 2179

EXDIS

DEPT PASS CINCPAC AND USSAG

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LA

SUBJECT: TALK WITH PATHET LAO NEGOTIATOR PHOUN APRASEUTH

1. AT MY REQUEST BRITISH AMBASSADOR DAVIDSON HAD PATHET LAO NEGOTIATOR PHOUN SIPRASEUTH AND ME TO DINNER LAST NIGHT. PHOUN WAS ACCOMPANIED BY AN "INTERPRETER" BOUTSABONG. IN THE COURSE OF A QUIET AND CORDIAL EVENING THE FOLLOWING SUBJECTS WERE COVERED:

A) FORMATION OF THE COALITION. PHOUN SAID THAT HE SAW NO REASON WHY THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT BE FORMED NEXT WEEK. THERE WERE A FEW LOOSE ENDS TO BE TIDIED UP BUT SOUVANNA COULD GIVE ORDERS TO HAVE THE NECESSARY MEASURES PUT INTO EFFECT. THERE WAS ALSO THE PROBLEM OF INVESTITURE BY THE KING BUT SOUVANNA WOULD DOUBTLESS GET THE KING IN LINE. PHOUN DID NOT CONFIRM SOUVANNA'S EARLIER STATEMENT TO ME THAT PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG WOULD ARRIVE NEXT WEEK, BUT HE GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG WOULD BE HERE IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE.

B) ZONES. I SAID I UNDERSTOOD THAT THE DISPUTED MILITARY RE-DEPLOYMENTS IN LUANG PRABANG HAD TAKEN PLACE. YES, SAID PHOUN,

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THE RLG POSITIONS HAD BEEN WITHDRAWN AND NOW THE EASY QUESTION

OF "ZONES" WAS ALL THAT REMAINED. IN HIS VIEW THE PL SHOULD TAKE ONE SIDE OF THE RIVER AND THE RLG THE OTHER. THIS WOULD IMPROVE SECURITY AND PREVENT INCIDENTS. I NOTED THAT I DIDN'T RECALL ANY PROVISIONS FOR ZONES IN THE ACCORD OR THE PROTOCOL. PHOUN SEEMED SURPRISED AND THEN COMMENTED THAT THIS WAS JUST A LOGICAL MILITARY ARRANGEMENT TO KEEP THE TWO SIDES APART. (COMMENT: WE WILL REPORT SEPTTEL ON THE QUESTION OF ZONES. IT IS HARD TO AVOID THE FEELING THAT LARGE SLICES OF SALAMI ARE BEING CARVED OUT OF THE RLG BY ITS ACCEPTANCE OF ZONES NEAR THE CAPITALS IN WHICH EACH SIDE WILL OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY.

C) POW'S AND MIA'S. I DREW PHOUN'S ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT HANOI HAD AT LAST RETURNED THE BODIES OF THE AMERICANS WHO HAD DIED IN CAPTIVITY AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT AN EARLY RESOLUTION OF THE POW/MIA QUESTION COULD BE ACHIEVED. I ALSO INQUIRED REGARDING THE POSSIBLE TIMING OF THE RELEASE OF POW EMMETT KAY. PHOUN REPLIED THAT HE WAS MINDFUL OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ISSUE AND ALTHOUGH HE COULD MAKE NO SPECIFIC COMMITMENT, KAY WOULD BE RELEASED PROMPTLY AFTER THE FORMATION OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT.

D) RELATIONS WITH THAILAND. THE SUBJECT OF LAO-THAI RELATIONS CAME UP IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POL CRISIS AND I POINTED OUT TO PHOUN THAT IN MY VIEW THE NEW COALITION GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE SPECIAL PAINS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH THAILAND. I POINTED OUT THAT THE PRESENT CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT IN BANGKOK APPEARED TO ME TO BE ONE WHICH WOULD HAVE MORE SYMPATHY FOR THE NEW LAO GOVERNMENT THAN MIGHT A FUTURE GOVERNMENT MADE UP OF MILITARY OFFICERS. THERE WERE MANY REPORTS THAT PATHET LAO AGENTS WERE BEING INTRODUCED INTO NORTHEASTERN THAILAND AND ONE COULD NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT MILITARY LEADERS IN THAILAND WOULD SEIZE ON THIS "THREAT" AS A MEANS OF RE-ESTABLISHING THEMSELVES IN POWER. IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THE PATHET LAO SHOULD BALANCE THE GAINS ACHIEVED BY WHATEVER SECRET OPERATIONS THEY WERE CONDUCTING AGAINST THE POTENTIALLY SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES FOR LAOS OF HAVING TO DEAL WITH A HOSTILE REGIME IN BANGKOK. PHOUN'S DENIAL THAT PL WERE "INTERFERING IN THAILAND'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS" WAS FAR FROM PERSUASIVE BUT HE CONCEDED THAT MY ARGUMENT HAD CONSIDERABLE "POLITICAL" MERIT AND HE AFFIRMED VERY VIGOROUSLY THAT THE PL DESIRED GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES AND PARTICULARLY WITH
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THAILAND.

E) ECONOMY. PHOUN COMMENTED THAT THERE APPEARED TO HIM TO BE AN EXCESSIVE AMOUNT OF LUXURY PRODUCTS IN THE RLG ZONE AND HE CONTRASTED THIS OPULENCE WITH THE AUSTERITY MAINTAINED IN THE PL AREA. THERE WAS DESULTORY AND INCONCLUSIVE CONVERSATION ABOUT THE INTEGRATION OF THE "RED" KIP. I STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKET FORCES, NOTING THAT CONTROLLED PRICES WERE IMPOSSIBLE

TO MAINTAIN GIVEN THE NECESSITY OF ADJUSTING THE LAO ECONOMY TO PRICES IN THAILAND. PHOUN APPEARED TO UNDERSTAND THIS AND I DID NOT GET THE IMPRESSION THAT HE OR HIS COLLEAGUES WOULD BE DOCTRINAIRE ON ECONOMIC ISSUES.

F) EDUCATION. PHOUN SPOKE AT SOME LENGTH ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN ACHIEVING NATIONAL UNITY IN LAOS. I DREW HIS ATTENTION TO THE US-SUPPORTED FA NGUM SCHOOL PROGRAM. I DON'T BELIEVE HE KNEW WE WERE SUPPORTING SECONDARY SCHOOLING IN THE LAO LANGUAGE.

G) PROPAGANDA. I MENTIONED QUIETLY TO PHOUN THAT THERE APPEARED TO ME TO BE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PATHET LAO POLICIES AS EXPLAINED BY HIM AND THE VICIOUSLY ANTI-AMERICAN PROPAGANDA BEING BROADCAST BY THE SO-CALLED PATHET LAO RADIO. I SAID I FOUND THIS CONTRADICTION HARD TO UNDERSTAND AND NOTED THAT THE CONSTANT BARRAGE OF COLD WAR POLEMICS DID NOT CONTRIBUTE TO AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE. PHOUN SEEMED SURPRISED AT MY RAISING THIS MATTER. HE SAID THAT HE HAD NOT LISTENED TO "SAM NEUA RADIO." I GOT THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT HE WOULD TRY TO GET IT TONED DOWN.

H) NARCOTICS. I EXPLAINED TO PHOUN THAT AFTER AN EARLY EMPHASIS ON NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION ACTIVITIES WE WERE WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE RLG ON DETOXIFICATION AND CROP SUBSTITUTION. PHOUN SAID THE PL WERE MOST INTERESTED IN ERADICATING DRUG ADDICTION IN THEIR ZONE ALTHOUGH MANY MOUNTAIN PEOPLE WERE STILL ADDICTED. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED BY THIS EMBASSY IT APPEARS THAT THE PL WILL BE FAVORABLY INCLINED TOWARD INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS PROGRAMS ALTHOUGH I CONTINUE TO DOUBT THAT SOME OF OUR ADVISORY ACTIVITIES WILL BE PALATABLE TO THEM.

2. COMMENT: I FOUND PHOUN TO BE QUIET, AGREEABLE, RELATIVELY
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REASONABLE AND HARD AS NAILS. HE LISTENS, HOWEVER, AND I BELIEVE THAT HIS MIND IS NOT SHUT TO WESTERN POSITIONS WHICH ARE PRESENTED IN A LOGICAL AND CANDID MANNER. HE USES NO COMMUNIST JARGON IN CONVERSATION AND COMES ON AS A LAO PATRIOT WHO IS TRYING TO RESTORE PEACE AND NATIONAL UNITY. OUR DISCUSSION OF THE ZONES QUESTION GAVE ME AN INKLING, HOWEVER, OF HOW VERY STUBBORN AND DETERMINED HE MAY BE IN DISCUSSING SUBSTANTIVE POINTS.
WHITEHOUSE

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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